Irregularities found in PA, MPA hostels' accounts

By Intikhab Hanif

LAHORE, Dec 31: An audit and inspection report prepared by the Director-General, Audit, Punjab, has pointed out serious irregularities in the accounts of the Punjab Assembly and its attached MPAs hostels.

The audit was conducted last month from 1994 to 1998, covering both the PDF and the PML governments. Its report specially expresses its concern over the low rent of MPAs hostel and describes it as an injustice to the taxpayers.

According to the report, overseas calls amounting to Rs 527,492 were made by different officials and elected representatives as against the privileges of the assembly which did not allow anybody, including the Speaker, to avail this facility.

"Speaker, ministers and opposition leaders are entitled to unlimited calls (official and private). But private calls do not include overseas calls. From audit point of view these overseas calls were unjustified and irregular," the report says, asking for the recovery of the money from the people concerned.

The telephone numbers from which these calls were made include those of the Deputy Speaker and the Leader of the Opposition.

The report mentions spending of Rs 56,260 on printing of assembly debates during 1996-97 without obtaining a no-objection certificate from the Government Printing Press, which was a violation of the rules.

The debates were printed by a private party on quotations obtained in 1990. The comparative statement to justify it was undated and not signed by the assembly's Printing Committee. Four firms had offered Rs 116 per page for the 400 copies but reasons for rejecting the offers of three firms were not recorded nor was the approval of the contract winning firm shown to the audit.

Further, the debates were printed after an "abnormal" delay of seven years but the late delivery charges were not deducted from the bill. Also, no reason was given for accepting the work done after such a great delay.

The report says in reply to audit observations, the omission was admitted by the assembly authorities concerned. It recommends that the irregularities should be got condoned by the Finance Department. Instead, the amount should be recovered from those found responsible for the deal.

The audit report mentions that store articles worth Rs 41,063 were issued without maintaining records. In some cases orders of officers in charge competent to issue store articles were also not produced. "This created reason to believe that there was every possibility that the articles were misappropriated. The matter may be inquired into and facts brought to books," the report says.

It says as per law, trade and professional tax was required to be collected from suppliers/ contractors at the rate of Rs 1,000 each in a year for supplying goods, selling commodities and rendering services to government institutions. But no such tax was paid by the firms/ suppliers during 1994-98. The report recommends recovery of the taxes amounting to Rs 54,000.

It finds that mortgage deeds on account of house building advances amounting to Rs 1.49 million given to 32 low grade employees were not executed under the rules.

It recommends that either the mortgage deeds be immediately executed in favour of the government or the recovery be made from the defaulters alongwith interest accrued thereupon and deposited into government treasury.

The report finds that stock registers of general store, stationery, electric goods and equipments were not being maintained properly.

The irregularities found include un-attested entries in registers, no date of issuance, unauthorized overwriting, erasings and self-made requisitions.

Stock registers of Pipal's House Hostel were defective in entirety. Not a single entry was ever got attested or singed by the store keeper. The report asked for detailed investigations into the matter and disciplinary action against defaulters.

The report describes daily rent of Rs 50 of "highly decorated suites" in MPAs hostels as negligible. It finds the suites extraordinarily decorated with latest facilities including wall to wall carpets, airconditioners, refrigerators, televisions, room heaters and telephones.

"The rent of such suites is not less than Rs 1,000 per day in any hotel. The minimum overhead charges for these facilities could have exceeded Rs 200 per day and if the rent of the room is added with the services of staff including bearer, cook and peon, it may go up still further", the report says.

It observes: "Our country is an under-developed one and cannot bear such extravagance. The taxes are collected from the people and the main aim of their collection is to provide basic facilities like health and education.

"It is regretted to mention here that the revenue is being wasted on such luxurious apartments and the people will remain under the poverty line. It is therefore suggested that the schedule of rent and other services may be re-examined with a sympathetic and patriotic view and necessary amendments made."

The audit report says savings amounting to Rs 8.32 million were not surrendered well in time and as a result these were lapsed. This was done in violation of government rules and reasons for this must be explained.